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SUBJECT: MAURITANIA: 2008 COUNTRY REPORTS ON TERRORISM

REF: A. STATE 120019
[1](#)B. STATE 124815

[1](#)1. (U) Post's submission for the "2008 Country Reports on Terrorism" (Refs A and B) follows in paragraph 2. Post's primary point of contact is PolAsst Christopher Coffey (coffeycm@state.gov). Post's secondary point of contact is Charge Dennis Hankins (hankinsdb@state.gov).

[1](#)2. (U) AQIM continued to represent the primary terrorist threat to Mauritania. After two spontaneous, fatal attacks in late December 2007, AQIM significantly increased its level of activity and severity of attacks in 2008.

On February 1, six gunmen attacked the Israeli embassy and an adjacent nightclub in Nouakchott. No one was killed, but three foreigners were injured. AQIM claimed responsibility for the attack, and all the perpetrators were later arrested by Mauritanian security forces.

In April, one of the suspects in the attack on French tourists in December 2007 escaped from the main Nouakchott courthouse. This led to an intensive manhunt that culminated in a pitched gun battle between Mauritanian security forces and several suspected terrorists who had holed up in a house. A police inspector and two suspects were killed in the shootout, and several were wounded. The remaining suspects managed to escape, though several were later arrested, including the suspect who had escaped from the courthouse. Based on these arrests and other ongoing investigations, Mauritanian security forces discovered a villa in Nouakchott stocked with weapons and explosives.

On August 6, General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz launched a bloodless coup against democratically-elected President Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi. This affront to civilian rule resulted in USG suspension of all non-humanitarian assistance, including counterterrorism military training, to the junta-led Mauritanian government. When General Aziz pledged to spare no effort in fighting terrorism, AQIM released an internet message stating the coup was against the will of the people, and called on Mauritians to take up arms against the military leadership.

On September 15, an ambush on a military convoy near the remote northern village of Tourine resulted in the deaths of 11 soldiers and a civilian guide. The attack was particularly gruesome, with the attackers decapitating the soldiers and mining their bodies with explosives. AQIM claimed responsibility for the attack.

The lawless eastern and northern regions of Mauritania continued to be a haven for smugglers and terrorists. The porous borders with Algeria, Mali, and Western Sahara posed ongoing challenges for the underequipped and underfunded Mauritanian security services. A new counterterrorism

force, which received USG training and assistance before the coup, was rushed into deployment in October in an attempt to bolster Mauritania's northern defenses in the wake of the Tourine attack. This new counterterrorism force is untested in combat as of December 2008.

The Mauritanian government arrested approximately 90 terror suspects during 2007 and 2008 combined. Around 60 of these suspects were arrested in April 2008 during the massive manhunt for the escaped suspect in the attack on French tourists. All suspects from that attack were arrested (or rearrested) and are in custody as of December 2008.

HANKINS